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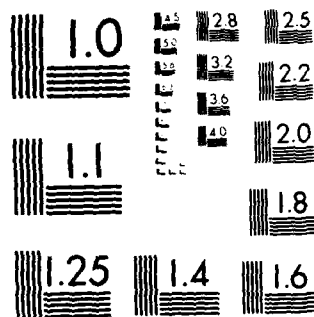
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LETTERS FROM AN ARMY OFFICER  
TO HIS SON CONCERNING THE  
STUDY OF THE GREAT CAPTAINS

BY

LIEUTENANT CORONEL DAVID L. RAGGETT

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paper examines the campaigns, lives, styles, and accomplishments of Alexander, Hannibal, Caesar, Gustavus Adolphus, and Turenne for their relevance today. This examination takes the form of a series of letters written by a serving army officer to his son who is a West Point cadet. Each man discussed was clearly the preeminent soldier of his day and served his country well, some as servants of the State, others as both ruler and commander of forces. Tactically much has changed over the nearly 2,500 years since Alexander and much changed between the times of Alexander and Turenne. At the tactical level, the experiences of the great men lose relevance today, although the need for innovation and technological advancement continues. Operationally and strategically: logistics remains the critical path for any operation and a balance between slavish adherence and disregard for the "principles of war" must be struck. Personal characteristics and traits still relevant today include courage (physical and moral), self-confidence, and an understanding of the moral factors of war. The most important thing to grasp is not which man should be studied, rather the necessity to study is the most enduring requirement; who to study will be self-evident.

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LETTERS FROM AN ARMY OFFICER  
TO HIS SON CONCERNING THE  
STUDY OF THE GREAT CAPTAINS

AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

Lieutenant Colonel David L. Baggett

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U.S. Army War College  
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## ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: David L. Baggett, LTC, FA

TITLE: Letters from an Army Officer to his Son  
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- Designation of an individual as a Great Captain is a very subjective process. The term "Great Captain" is used loosely and broad agreement as to who is and who is not a "Great Captain" depends often on the philosophical viewpoint of the man compiling the list. Napoleon advised his son to "read and meditate often about history, this is the only real philosophy. And he should read and meditate about the wars of the great captains; it is the only way to learn the art of war." Napoleon's list of Great Captains included Alexander, Hannibal, Caesar, Gustavus Adolphus, Turenne, Eugene, and Frederick. This paper examines the campaigns, lives, styles, and accomplishments of Alexander, Hannibal, Caesar, Gustavus Adolphus, and Turenne for their relevance today. This examination takes the form of a series of letters written by a serving army officer to his son who is a West Point cadet. Each man discussed was clearly the preeminent soldier of his day and served his country well, some as servants of the State, others as both ruler and commander of forces. Tactically, much has changed over the nearly 2,500 years since Alexander and much changed between the times of Alexander and Turenne. At the tactical level, the experiences of the great men lose relevance today, although the need for innovation and technological advancement continues. Operationally and strategically: logistics remains the critical path for any operation and a balance between slavish adherence and disregard for the "principles of war" must be struck. Personal characteristics and traits still relevant today include courage (physical and moral), self-confidence, and an understanding of the moral factors of war. The most important thing to grasp is not which man should be studied, rather the necessity to study is the most enduring requirement; who to study will be self-evident. ←

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LETTERS FROM AN ARMY OFFICER  
TO HIS SON CONCERNING THE  
STUDY OF THE GREAT CAPTAINS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Dear Scott,

God, you, and I know that I am not a historian. This fact notwithstanding, I, like you who aspires to be a Commissioned Army Officer, am intent on learning from other's experience; I am intent on not repeating other's past mistakes; and I enjoy, vicariously, past events skillfully narrated. We all learn from models, models that are adequate only when they are drawn from multiple environments and when they are true to life.<sup>1</sup> Although over 200 years old, I like Frederick the Great's instructions regarding the value of learning from other's experience:

Every art has its rules and maxims. One must study them: theory facilitates practice. The lifetime of one man is not long enough to enable him to acquire perfect knowledge and experience. Theory helps to supplement it, it provides a youth with premature experience and makes him skillful also through the mistakes of others. In the profession of war the rules of the art never are violated without drawing punishment from the enemy, who is delighted to find us at fault. An officer can spare himself many mistakes by improving himself.<sup>2</sup>

There are entire books devoted to explaining why one should study history and to what uses history might be put.<sup>3</sup> I know that you are an avid reader and I very much admire the catholicity of your tastes in literature. I applaud your decision to major in history. My task is made somewhat easier in

that I do not have to prod you to pick up a book; rather, mine is more one of guidance from the vantage point of my experience.

I think that all history: economic, social, political, and technological, has something to offer if you but look, study, and reflect. But my concern here is military history, and, indeed, to understand military history, one must understand the economic, social, political and technological context in which it occurred. There is a major caution here: many who study military history attempt to "lift" what they perceive to be the lesson, tactic, or principle portrayed from the psychological, social, economic, and political setting in which it occurred and transplant it, willy-nilly, into a different context, and wonder why it does not fit. Without being unduly harsh in the judgment, it is a natural enough mistake for the amateur to make. The professional, which you are training to be, will avoid this pitfall by realizing that a lesson learned from history, once removed from its historical context, is not really a lesson at all. The value of history is to expose you to the thought process of earlier commanders, not to provide prepackaged solutions.<sup>4</sup>

These are the questions you must ask yourself. Given the circumstances: logistical, tactical, equipment, morale, etc., what alternatives were available to the commander? Why did he select the alternative that he did? The idea is to put yourself in the commander's place, get into his thought process, get under his skin, get inside his head.

One of the most entertaining, interesting, and effective ways to study military history is to study the campaigns of the Great Captains. The term "Great Captain" is used rather loosely and broad agreement as to who is and who is not a "Great Captain" depends often on the philosophical viewpoint of the man compiling the list. The notion that there existed a number of "Great Captains" appears to go back to the 18th century. Kings, princes, marshals, and generals were educated men; educated men read the classics; the paramount theme of the classics was war; therefore, since the classics constituted the most important part of military literature until the 18th century, it follows that the most prominent and successful generals of antiquity would emerge as models, or Great Captains. As I mentioned above, the composition of the lists of "Great Captains" or "Famous Generals" or however you style it, depends on the basis for their selection: fame, success, nationality, practitioners of a particular form of warfare, author idiosyncrasy, etc.<sup>5</sup> Certainly, we are talking about men of accomplishment who, among other things, were either excellent writers or who had persistent and expansive biographers.

Napoleon, very late in his life, advised his son to "read and meditate often about history, this is the only real philosophy. And he should read and meditate about the wars of the great captains; it is the only way to learn the art of war."<sup>6</sup> Napoleon's list included Alexander, Hannibal, Caesar, Gustavus Adolphus, Turenne, Eugene, and Frederick. What, if anything, do

the experiences of these men mean to us today? Are their actions relevant in any way to our endeavors today? What have these Great Captains got to say to us today? There are many men who might legitimately vie for designation as a Great Captain. My intention is to examine the actions, styles, and accomplishments of Alexander, Hannibal, Caesar, Gustavus Adolphus, and Turenne for their relevance today. Study of Eugene and Frederick is merited; they are omitted here because I have run out of time. Clausewitz placed little emphasis on experience prior to Frederick, contending that conditions were too different (prior to Frederick) with respect to armaments; tactics; maneuver; and ratios of infantry, cavalry, and artillery, to render study of those campaigns relevant when compared to those waged by Frederick and Napoleon.<sup>7</sup> Let us see for ourselves.

#### ENDNOTES

1. Henry S. Bausman, "Introduction," in The John Biggs Cincinnati Lectures in Military Leadership and Command, 1986, ed. by Henry S. Bausman, p. 5.

2. Jay Luvaas, ed. and trans., Frederick the Great on the Art of War, p. 54.

3. See for example: A.L. Rowse, The Use of History (New York, 1965); John S. Berry, "History as a Science," Varieties of History, ed. Fritz Stern (New York, 1960); Karl A. Popper, "Has History any Meaning?" in The Nature of Historical Inquiry, ed. Leonard M. Marsak (New York, 1970); Ernest R. May, "Lessons" of the Past: The Use and Misuse of History in American Foreign Policy (London, 1973); and William H. McNeill, My History and Other Essays (Chicago, 1986).

4. I have heard Jay Luvaas, an instructor of mine at the War College, say this on numerous occasions. It can also be found in the following citation: Jay Luvaas, "Frederick the Great: The Education of a Great Captain," in The John Biggs Cincinnati Lectures in Military Leadership and Command, 1986, ed. by Henry S. Bausman, p. 33.

5. The gist of the foregoing paragraph was contained in some thoughts I received from Jay Luvaas on 1 February 1988. To my knowledge they are not otherwise published.

6. Jay Luvaas, "Thinking at the Operational Level," Parameters, Spring 1986, p. 2.

7. Carl von Clausewitz, On War, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, pp. 195-196, 275, 190-291, 303.

## CHAPTER II

### ALEXANDER

As we look at each of these Great Captains I do not intend to recount in any comprehensive manner their life stories. Certainly, illustrative aspects of their experiences will be useful. My intention is briefly to capture or distill from their campaigns and leadership styles those aspects most descriptive of them and relevant to our endeavors today. Neither have I broadly canvassed the literature on each man. Instead, I have selected, or tried to select, one biographer of each Great Captain with a military background. My reasoning being that this biographer/soldier would be looking at the subject with the same filter that would be most useful to us.

Alexander<sup>1</sup> succeeded his father, Philip, as King of Macedonia in 336 B.C. He died in 324 B.C., having reigned for 12 years. In the course of these 12 years he subdued Greece and conquered the Persian Empire, extending Greek influence throughout Asia and into India for centuries to come. Alexander begins the list of Great Captains for the stunning breadth and extent of his conquests, his ingenuity, and, inescapably, his genius: his ability to fire the imaginations of his people, his ability to win over the people he conquered, his mystical grip on friend and foe.<sup>2</sup>

There is a tendency to disregard or overlook the possible lessons of nearly 25 centuries ago. However, it is interesting

to note the similarities in conditions prevailing then and now: the wars and discords of national states today replicate those of city-states of the 4th and 5th Century B.C.; democracy was as emotional then and therefore as irrational as it is now; demagoguery was as prevalent; the welfare state was as well known; citizens were paid to attend Assemblies,<sup>3</sup> etc., etc. It is instructive to study how Philip, and then Alexander, exploited these conditions and then to consider the relevancy of their methods today.

Commanding at no time an army of more than 40,000 men, Alexander conquered most of the then known world adapting his father's strategy of "fraud before force, but force at the last."<sup>4</sup> His strategic aim was subordinate to his political aim, and his tactical aim was subordinate to his strategic aim.<sup>5</sup> Winning over the vast number of peoples and races conquered without arousing unnecessary antagonism was his political aim; defeat of the various enemy armies was his strategic aim;<sup>6</sup> the penetration was the tactical means in all his great battles.<sup>7</sup> Therefore he adopted a policy of conciliation, of partnership, of alliance, of co-option of the vanquished. In this way he left in his rear a peaceful and friendly country that did not require a large garrison. Freedom and self-determination became pillars of his policy.<sup>8</sup> All actions were subordinated to the political end. Alexander was Clausewitzian 23 centuries before the Baron.<sup>9</sup>

One reads most of Alexander's great victories, and it is true that he was never defeated on the battlefield. Of equal, if not

greater, importance are the reasons for and how the wars were waged. Great battles were fought outside of cities so that the destruction that inevitably accompanies a battle did not consume the ultimate object of the battle. His aim was conquest not vengeance or spoilation, and, further, conquest at the minimum expenditure of force and minimum dislocation and damage to the Persian Empire.<sup>10</sup> These are lessons and models that neither Hitler adopted in the conquest of Russia in 1941-44 nor the Allied Powers applied in pursuing "victory at all costs" against both pro- and anti-Hitler Germans in bringing World War II to an end.<sup>11</sup>

What of Alexander's great battles? Examined in light of what we today call the principles of war, they are generally models of application. I don't think Alexander studied the principles of war per se. He had for mentors his father Philip and, among others, Aristotle. From his father he inherited energy and practical sense; Aristotle instilled an insatiable curiosity and a love of knowledge.<sup>12</sup> That's pretty hefty tutelage and you would do well to seek men of such stature to learn from. Most importantly, Alexander was heir to an excellent army, the most perfectly organized, trained, and equipped Army of classical times.<sup>13</sup> In addition, Persia was in decline. Taken together, these were most propitious circumstances.<sup>14</sup> Alexander improved what he had, made sound policy and strategic decisions, and continually upgraded equipment and his organization.

It seems to me a measure of Alexander's greatness that, over 12 years of continuous campaigning, he won great and small



battles, he waged successful siege warfare, he fought a successful guerrilla war, he fought in deserts and mountains, he conducted night operations, he conducted opposed river crossings, he employed deception, and administered numerous conquered countries glad to be free of Persian control. The diversity of circumstances and challenges requiring flexibility of thought and conception is breath-taking. Yet, each was met successfully with just the right tactic, never repeated.

What utility does Alexander's experience have for us today? These things seem to be relevant: thorough preparation is important - you need to know your craft; flexibility of thought and mind are essential - you need to be willing to entertain new ideas; the logistics of a plan is the critical path - Alexander was a master logistician; there are principles of war which you ignore at your peril - their application can be well appreciated by studying Alexander's campaigns; and war is a means to an end - the end is peace.

#### ENDNOTES

1. My principal source on Alexander is J.F.C. Fuller, The Generalship of Alexander the Great (London: Butler and Tanner, Ltd., 1958).

2. Ibid., pp. 281-283.

3. Ibid., p. 307.

4. Ibid., p. 24.

5. Ibid., p. 294.

6. Ibid., p. 285.

7. Ibid., p. 294.

8. Ibid., pp. 91-92.

9. On War, by Carl von Clausewitz, is an indispensable addition to your professional library. The best translation is cited in footnote 7 to Chapter I. One might observe cynically that everyone quotes Clausewitz, few read Clausewitz. I encourage you to be the exception.

10. Fuller, The Generalship of Alexander the Great, pp. 264-265.

11. Ibid., pp. 308-313.

12. Ibid., p. 56.

13. Ibid., p. 48.

14. Ibid., pp. 78-79.

## CHAPTER III

### HANNIBAL<sup>1</sup>

The second of Napoleon's Great Captains I considered is Hannibal. (You should infer no relative ranking or priority from the order in which these men are considered. I have taken them in this order for chronological reasons only: from most ancient to most recent.)

Hannibal, a Carthaginian, lived from 245 B.C. to 180 B.C. During the period 264 B.C. to 146 B.C. the Romans and the Carthaginians fought a series of wars called the Punic Wars (First Punic War: 264-241 B.C.; Second Punic War: 218-202 B.C.; Third Punic War: 149-146 B.C.), the basic aims of which were the expansion of the Roman Empire and, subsequently, its security from external threat, which was, in the case of these wars, the Carthaginians.<sup>2</sup> At stake was who would rule the world: Rome or Carthage.<sup>3</sup> Each war resulted in an expansion of the Roman Empire and consequent diminution of Carthaginian influence with the conclusion of the Third Punic War resulting in the destruction of Carthage and the addition of Africa to the list of Roman provinces.<sup>4</sup>

You can infer from this chronology that Hannibal's genius flourished during the Second Punic War. Ultimately, it was beaten down by the efforts of a series of Roman generals or consuls and a lack of support by Carthage. Hannibal, unlike Alexander, Caesar, Gustavus Adolphus, Frederick the Great, and

Napoleon, was never the head of state or government or ruler of his country. He was never a soldier-statesman, devising grand strategy which linked the success of his military exploits to the achievement of a broader vision for his country. In this disconnect lies the basis for his eventual military downfall: the leadership in Carthage was unable or unwilling to see the interrelationship of the operations of their armies in Spain, Italy, and Sicily and to furnish support commensurate to the tasks facing their field generals. The consequence was that Rome, facing a life and death threat to its existence and willing to resource its armies not only with men and materiel but with an integrated, broadly conceived and executed strategy, prevailed.

This broad-brush and highly generalized summation notwithstanding, Hannibal's exploits and generalship were remarkable. Consider what he had to work with. Carthage had no native army, and, in this respect, was greatly inferior to Rome. The Carthagenians were a "trading people" who began war as a mercantile speculation. Therefore, Carthage hired her soldiers. Throughout the ages mercenaries have been as formidable to their employers as to the enemy against whom they were directed.<sup>5</sup> It is rank understatement to say that Hannibal had a tough leadership problem. I like the following description of the appearance of a Carthaginian army as an indicator of its diversity:

It was an assemblage of the most opposite races of the human species, from the farthest parts of the globe. Hordes of half-naked Gauls were ranged next to companies of white-clothed Iberians, and savage Ligurians next to the far-travelled Nasamones and Lotophagi. Carthaginians and Phoenici-Africans formed the Center; while innumerable troops of Numidian horsemen, taken from all the tribes of the Desert, swarmed about on unsaddled horses, and formed the wings; the van was composed of Balearic slingers; and a line of colossal elephants, with their Ethiopian guides formed, as it were, a chain of moving fortresses before the whole army.<sup>6</sup>

You might say that Hannibal was able to wage coalition warfare with a skill our NATO leadership must envy. He was able to form these disparate parts into a compact and organized force and inspire them with a spirit of discipline and loyalty. This army was never routed, never mutinied, and went to its death fighting for him.<sup>7</sup> It is probably accurate to observe, as I think Napoleon did, that these men fought for Hannibal, not Carthage. This is powerful testimony to his leadership.

The novice, when studying Hannibal, gets diverted by his crossing of the Alps. In fact, this was an incredible feat and it was something of a psychological victory that he made it into Italy at all. He certainly seized the initiative from the Romans who were complacent as a result of their victory in the First Punic War and, consequently, slow to react to the threat Hannibal posed.<sup>8</sup> Hannibal left Spain with 90,000 infantry and 12,000 cavalry. He arrived in Italy with 20,000 infantry and 6,000 cavalry. Crossing the Alps was an expensive proposition.<sup>9</sup> Great leadership was the order of the day, keeping his army together under extremely harsh conditions. His grasp of logistics, not

only in crossing the Alps, but in sustaining his army for 16 years in a hostile country, rivalled that of Alexander. Hannibal's system of making war support itself had two important ramifications: to a certain extent he was independent of his line of communications, carrying supplies of all sorts with him; on the other hand the quantity of plunder he was compelled to carry added immensely to his difficulties both in fighting and marching.<sup>10</sup> (Plunder was important for support and also for gratification of his troops, the impact was that marches were short.<sup>11</sup>)

Hannibal's strategy was to detach as many allies from Rome as quickly as possible and thereby isolate the Roman republic proper in the midst of a surrounding hostile population.<sup>12</sup> To gather allies to his side and to recruit back the strength of his force thereby recouping the losses sustained crossing the Alps, he sought decisive battle with the Romans. The Romans, unfamiliar with Hannibal's prowess, were quick to engage him, and, in a series of major battles, all Carthaginian victories in a period of less than two years, played into his hands. At the Ticinus, Trebbia, Lake Thrasymene, and Cannae the Romans learned some painful lessons. Hannibal was brilliant at maneuver warfare and combined arms actions. His cavalry was far superior to that of the Romans for the entire 16 year period Hannibal occupied Italy. Not only was Hannibal's cavalry the primary agent of victory in most of his battles, it kept his army fed when the Romans got smarter in fighting him.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, his army was

handicapped by its lack or shortage of siege artillery throughout the Italian campaign.<sup>14</sup> This begs the question why some was not acquired. The ability to conduct a successful siege would have been very handy on more than one occasion. More than likely Hannibal's lack of enthusiasm for siege warfare can be traced to its lack of moral decisiveness relative to maneuver warfare. Plus, Hannibal had it all over Roman consuls in a one-on-one fight in the open, and this advantage was negated in siege warfare.<sup>15</sup>

Rome was a resilient and resourceful enemy. Although Hannibal had overrun most of Italy; killed, captured, or dispersed by the tens of thousands Rome's soldiers; and co-opted and deprived her of a number of her allies by the fall of 216 B.C., Rome, though shaken, was far from beaten. It is significant that Hannibal, following his greatest triumph at Cannae refused to march on Rome.<sup>16</sup> Obviously, he judged his strength inadequate to the task. Certainly, Rome's ability to raise and support forces, even in the face of an invader of the stature of Hannibal, exceeded his. At this point in time the lack of an overall integrated Carthaginian strategy was most costly.<sup>17</sup> In the remaining 14 years that Hannibal occupied Italy, never would such an opportunity as that which existed following Cannae again present itself. For their part, the Roman army, hereafter (with two exceptions) offered Hannibal no opportunity to maneuver or to use his cavalry. Hereafter, Hannibal repelled defeat rather than commanded victory.<sup>18</sup>

The Romans now took what could only be termed a long view of the war. They watched Hannibal constantly, wore out his troops with long marches and petty skirmishes, and never engaged in combat unless the chances of success were greatly in their favor.<sup>19</sup> The brilliance of Hannibal's leadership and the ascendancy of his reputation were never more apparent than during this timeframe (215-202 B.C.). Although his successes were less arresting, Roman legions far superior in strength to his army encircled him but never ventured to give him battle. He was invincible - he had overrun half of Italy, crossed and recrossed the Apennines, advanced to the very gates of Rome, and passed backwards and forwards through the midst of hostile armies.<sup>20</sup>

In the end, Hannibal's campaigns in Italy were brought to an end by the already-mentioned lack of support and vision at home and by a Roman threat to Carthage.

When reflecting on Hannibal, there seems to me to be an analogy between his life and that of George S. Patton. All analogies can be taken to excess, but in each case these men were superb fighters, polished practitioners of maneuver warfare, somewhat confounded by politicians and political intrigue, great leaders and motivators of men, thoroughly understood the importance of moral agents in war, possessed supreme self-confidence in their generalship, were audacious, studied and knew their adversaries and attacked their weaknesses, were men of great personal character (although the Carthaginian army depended far more on one man than did Third Army), exercised excellent tactical and



operational judgment, and served their countries well. In addition, each seemed to be far more beloved by their men than by their countries. In the end, if the soldier in the field is not committed as a part of a larger overall strategy, his labors have no purpose. Hannibal is justifiably a great captain; the potentially enduring value of his exploits was compromised by a lack of strategic vision, over which he had little control.

#### ENDNOTES

1. My source for Hannibal is Lieut. Col. P.L. MacDougall, The Campaigns of Hannibal Arranged and Critically Considered Expressly for the Use of Students of Military History (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, and Roberts, 1858).

2. J.F.C. Fuller, Julius Caesar: Man, Soldier and Tyrant (New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1965), pp. 17-18.

3. MacDougall, The Campaigns of Hannibal, p. 15.

4. Fuller, Julius Caesar, p. 18.

5. MacDougall, The Campaigns of Hannibal, pp. 17-18.

6. Ibid., p. 19.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid., p. 44.

9. Ibid., p. 35.

10. Ibid., pp. 80-81.

11. Ibid., pp. 58 and 66.

12. Ibid., p. 44.

13. Ibid., pp. 81 and 87.

14. Ibid., pp. 76-77.

15. Ibid., pp. 52 and 106.

16. Ibid., pp. 104-106.
17. Ibid., p. 111.
18. Ibid., pp. 125-126.
19. Ibid., p. 144.
20. Ibid., p. 155.

## CHAPTER IV

### CAESAR<sup>1</sup>

With each of the men we are studying it is difficult to separate them from their times. Caesar is no exception. Although the Roman Empire existed into the 4th century A.D., much of the decay in the moral fiber of Rome which led to its ultimate decline was considerably evident in the 1st century B.C., the time of Caesar's ascendancy as the leader of Rome and an age of violent power politics. Caesar was born in 100 B.C. He died, at age 56, in 44 B.C.<sup>2</sup>

Fuller's sketch of Caesar's personality and character will give you some idea of the man we are dealing with. Caesar would have approved of vigor, ability, and success; he was an artist of power; he was indifferent to moral distinctions; he was possessed of extraordinary versatility of mind; he was an intelligent patron of the arts and learning; he had a taste for the magnificent; he was ruthless and unscrupulous in gaining power; he was just and considerate once power was gained; he exercised supreme power with moderation; he was a realist; he was not led astray by ideals and ideologies; he was astute rather than imaginative; he was clear-sighted rather than long-sighted; he saw the immediate problem and set out to solve it; he never risked making best the enemy of good; he was intuitive; he was seldom led away by illusions concerning the abilities of men or the appearance of events; he was a supreme opportunist; he possessed supreme

self-confidence and faith in his fortune, audacity and subtlety; he was utterly amoral: if the means were good or evil meant nothing to him - he was totally governed by his end; he allowed nothing to stand in his way; he possessed phenomenal physical endurance; and he was particular about his personal appearance and his dress.<sup>3</sup>

Given that the foregoing captures, in several aspects, some of the essence of Caesar's character, there is much to like and admire and much that is distasteful and repellant. If Rome at this time highly valued men of honor and decency, it is certain that men with such qualities were pushed into the background in favor of those skilled at bribery, treachery, intrigue, and the notion that might makes right. Caesar was a man of, by, and for these times. The one quality in the foregoing description that bothers me most and that gives soldiers today the most problem concerns means and ends. You have to be concerned with both; you cannot disregard one for the other. By its very nature, soldiering is task oriented - how to mesh resources: men, materiel, and time, to accomplish your mission. There will often be temptations to cut corners to achieve your ends. In fact, cutting corners is acceptable and often will be required as long as they are not ethical corners - corners that compromise integrity, that rot the fiber of the institutions in whose name we are acting. Better ideas, more efficient methods, greater effort, all qualify in my mind as acceptable ways to cut corners. Make no mistake: this is a competitive business and the race is

to the clever of mind, the intuitive problem-solver, the inspirational leader. But to allow the ends to justify the means in the most destructive sense is to be avoided.

I digress, but since this advice is free and unsolicited, you will just have to sift through it. Now, let's get back to Caesar.

In contrast to Hannibal, who if he did not eschew political intrigue and involvement certainly kept it at arm's length, Caesar was a consummate politician - in fact, it is difficult (and may not be desirable) to separate the politician from the soldier. It may be observed that few men were more versatile than and as many-sided as Caesar. He was an outstanding general; he was a soldier skilled at arms and horsemanship who could compete with the best of his men; he was a remarkable orator; he was a demagogue of genius, a writer, a patron of the arts; and he had an interest in astronomy.<sup>4</sup>

Caesar was an amateur soldier of genius, neither trained nor educated for war nor interested in military affairs until he approached middle age.<sup>5</sup> The army he took over was deficient in that it was principally an infantry army; it lacked a trained cavalry and an efficient light infantry to add elasticity to the rigid defensive and offensive tactics of the legion; it lacked an organized commissariat and had no wagons and, therefore, could not keep his forces supplied. In this latter regard, his army was seldom adequately fed.<sup>6</sup> Inexplicably, Caesar never attempted to raise, organize, and train efficient cavalry and light

infantry. He did not have a conception of the supreme value of a highly trained cavalry. He never implemented an effective supply service.<sup>7</sup> The explanation for these oversights appears to be in his character. Seeing to careful preparations, obtaining adequate supplies, enlisting sufficient fighting forces, etc., were either distasteful details or lost to sight in reliance on his genius.<sup>8</sup> It should be noted that the Romans did employ some cavalry acquired from their allies. If Caesar was aware of the details of Alexander's exploits, his actions do not indicate it. It seems unlikely that the Roman army under Caesar could have sustained combat for long against the Macedonian army of Alexander, especially without cavalry support. This lack of application of combined arms forces is a clear departure for us today when we see the integration of all arms: infantry, cavalry, artillery, helicopters, etc., etc., as essential to battlefield success.

At the operational and strategic level the Roman army was not mobile; at the tactical level it was not effective in guerrilla warfare. The Romans, for security of the legion, resorted to entrenchments and became the greatest entrenching army in history. Not a few Roman campaigns can be called mobile trench warfare.<sup>9</sup> The aforementioned lack of cavalry (recall Hannibal's dependence on and success with his cavalry), the obsession with entrenchments, and its dependence on living off enemy country as it advanced meant that no Roman army had good strategic and operational mobility.<sup>10</sup> The aim of the legionary

organization was methodical attrition followed by a general massacre or enslavement. Against an enemy, such as a guerrilla force, who refused to stand and fight, the legion was relatively ineffective.<sup>11</sup>

Having beaten both Caesar and his army about the head and shoulders, how it is that together they expanded the greatest and most permanent of empires to the extent of the then known world? As a leader of men Caesar was head and shoulders above the generals of his day. As observed above, the Roman army strategically and operationally was not mobile; tactically, under Caesar, it depended on celerity and audacity to gain surprise and moral advantage. To Caesar may be attributed the tactical innovation of speed: "I consider rapidity of movement the best substitute for all these things; the most potent thing in war is the unexpected."<sup>12</sup>

Caesar was fortunate to have fought poor armies: the Gauls were undisciplined and untrained, and Pompey's army raw, untried, and without unity of command. Neither army was able to exploit the weaknesses I have already discussed.<sup>13</sup> Caesar wielded great moral superiority as a result of his enormous prestige; in his army there was unity of command - he did not have to have his proposals second-guessed by the Senate in Rome - this enabled him to come to rapid, unfettered and timely decisions; he had complete confidence in his men and in their loyalty to him - no small matter in a time when loyalties went to the highest bidder.<sup>14</sup>

In a Clausewitzian vein, Caesar understood the political nature of war and that, at the commencement of any hostilities, the character of the war required definition in terms of the political conditions and relations under which it would be waged. He grasped the distinction between a foreign war and a civil war and that each demanded a technique of its own. The type of war fought in Gaul was inappropriate in Italy. In a civil war it was as important to win the good will of the civil population as to impose his will on his adversary and more profitable to subvert his adversary's fighting forces than destroy them.<sup>15</sup>

I have some difficulty admiring Caesar. His accomplishments as a soldier, while not insignificant, do not approach those of Alexander or Hannibal. Only when his battlefield exploits are tied to his political achievements does his genius emerge. His army won when it had to, responding to Caesar's leadership, often retrieving an all-but-lost cause thrust on it by Caesar's bad judgment, hastily taken action, or lack of forethought. His was a cult of personality - the army was loyal to Caesar, not to the State; he ruthlessly used this power to further his own ends. He must have realized the weaknesses of his army, yet did little to correct them. His character and personality are so far removed from that which we teach and emulate today as to merit study for those traits and actions to avoid.



## ENDNOTES

1. My source for Caesar is J.F.C. Fuller, Julius Caesar: Man, Soldier, and Tyrant (New Brunswick, N.J., Rutgers University Press, 1965). You might think that Caesar's own Commentaries might be a worthwhile source, but, evidently, such is not the case. Although on the whole they are quite frank, they apparently are not accurate, either deliberately so or through carelessness; they are difficult to follow; they are uneven and sketchy - minor events are covered in great detail while more important ones go begging for attention. No doubt Caesar soft-pedalled his failures, exaggerated the number of his enemies, and omitted incidents which might have reflected badly on himself.

2. Ibid., p. 56.
3. Ibid., pp. 49-50, 54-56.
4. Ibid., p. 54.
5. Ibid., p. 315.
6. Ibid., p. 74, 315-316.
7. Ibid., p. 75, 315, 317.
8. Ibid., p. 82, 316.
9. Ibid., pp. 86-87.
10. Ibid., p. 87.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid., p. 321.
13. Ibid., p. 90, 318.
14. Ibid., p. 181.
15. Ibid.

CHAPTER V  
GUSTAVUS ADOLPHUS<sup>1</sup>

As we look at the career and contributions to the art of war of the great Swedish king, Gustavus Adolphus, it is important to understand that we have just leaped forward in time nearly 17 centuries since Caesar. Gustavus Adolphus was born in 1594, succeeded to the Swedish throne in 1611 at age 17, and died during the Battle of Lutzen in November 1632.

Why the immense gap between Caesar and Gustavus Adolphus? The short answer is that during this extended period there was no leader whose deeds added anything to the art of war. Elaborating very briefly: with the fall of the Roman Empire in the 4th century A.D., cavalry became the primary arm of warfare while the foot soldier sank into obscurity; feudalism introduced the mailed knight whose instability equalled his courage; armored mercenaries succeeded the knights, but were no better; feudalism called for castles, and castles led to a war of sieges; of strategy and tactics there was none; the Crusades, although full of prowess, gave us few military lessons except that of blind devotion.<sup>2</sup>

Infantry began to reappear in the 14th century in the form of the Swiss pikeman and the English long-bowman. These two individuals, together with the invention of gunpowder, proved to the knight in armor that he was not invincible. The disappearance of feudalism, the growth of intelligence, and the invention

of gunpowder all contributed to the reestablishment of warfare as a science. The cross-bow began to be replaced by the musket and the unwieldy knight gave way to the more active footman. As kings gained power and raised their own armies, war became more regular. By 1600 the conditions were right for the rehabilitation of the art of war.<sup>3</sup>

This brings us to Gustavus Adolphus. He was what we, today, might call a precocious child. He early showed promise and he clearly had the potential to be a great leader; instruction and guidance were provided to ensure its realization. According to Hodge, Gustavus Adolphus was a young man of great personal beauty and strength; he had a deep and earnest religious nature; he was strongly imbued with the tenets of Protestantism; he was of unswerving moral character; possessed warm affections, and great amiability; he was very frank; he had a strict sense of rectitude; he was courageous to the point of recklessness - he absolutely ignored danger and very much resembled Alexander in the Homeric quality of his courage (he was wounded on several occasions - once severely - and when his body was recovered after his death at the Battle of Lutzen it had five gunshot wounds, three cuts, and one thrust)<sup>4</sup>; he spoke and read seven languages; he was considered the best orator in Sweden; he was unexcelled in the use of weapons and good in gymnastic sports; early in life he was quick-tempered, but was equally quick to make amends.<sup>5</sup>

As sketchy, uneven, and doubtful as the character of Caesar was, so clean and admirable is the character of Gustavus

Adolphus; there doesn't appear to be a discouraging word about this man's character. It seems to be a model in all respects: highly unusual for the 17th century.

Gustavus Adolphus' most significant battlefield victories occurred in 1631 and 1632, during the last of which he was killed. To recount briefly his military engagements: he inherited hostilities with Denmark on his assumption of the crown in 1611; he fought the Russians, 1615-1617, in a dispute over who would be named Czar; Sweden sporadically engaged in hostilities with Poland 1621-1627, whose ruler coveted the Swedish throne; in 1630 Sweden entered the Thirty Years War. The battles and wars preceding 1630 were small and minor in nature but were important as testing grounds for Gustavus' ideas on organization and tactics, and for the development of a mutual feeling of respect between the leader and the led.<sup>6</sup> The foregoing is a somewhat long way of trying to put some context on the Thirty Years War, because not only does it involve Gustavus Adolphus but also our next Great Captain, Turenne.

I do not pretend to understand the causes of the Thirty Years War (1618-1648). Suffice it to say it had two broad causes: the desires of the Catholic princes of Germany to prevent the growth of Protestantism, and the desire of the Emperor of the German Empire (also the acknowledged successor of the Roman Caesars and of Charles the Great) to establish his rule, in fact as opposed to in name only, over all of Germany. These two purposes were inconsistent: while subordinate rulers would work

on the one hand to further the religious aims, they would work, on the other hand, to frustrate the temporal one. The Thirty Years War occurred in four phases: the Religious (1618-1625), the Danish (1625-1630), the Swedish (1630-1635), and the French (1635-1648).<sup>7</sup> As mentioned, Gustavus figured prominently in the Swedish phase; Turenne played a part in the French phase.

Gustavus Adolphus has been called the father of modern war for the farsighted, broad-ranging, lasting, and much-imitated innovations he introduced in organization, in tactics, in the conduct of battle, and in the administration and supply of armies. Although his campaigns and battles prior to 1630 were relatively minor in scope and impact, they were harbingers of the impact of a great thinker, organizer, and motivator. At Walhof in January 1626, he made a river crossing, a night march, and attacked and defeated a very much larger Polish force. The keys to this victory were the highly effective combination of shock tactics of the cavalry with the fire of his musketeers. Winter warfare was not unprecedented, but clearly Gustavus had provided appropriate attire for his men and was prepared to operate in a part of the world where winters are severe.<sup>8</sup> The records of the campaign of 1625 in Estonia mentions the use of "snow-shoemen," illustrating that little escaped his attention and fertile imagination.<sup>9</sup>

The action at Mewe in October 1626 is significant in that the fight was won by musket fire only. This represented a bold innovation and the defeat of a superior force of all arms by fire

alone at Mewe, together with the tactics employed at Walhof marked the beginning of the era of modern war.<sup>10</sup> With the ability to inflict casualties with stand-off fire (probably the major factor of modern war), the day of the infantryman was returning. Pikemen were necessary for defense while the muskets were being reloaded (a procedure that reportedly entailed 99 separate and time-consuming movements), but Gustavus increased the number of muskets relative to pikemen to increase the firepower of his formations.<sup>11</sup>

Gustavus Adolphus was the first to organize a regular army (other than that composed of mercenaries) through a carefully regulated system of conscription that granted land to enlistees. We already have noted his appreciation of the power of fire. He did away with armor for his musketeers, with the exception of a helmet; he shortened the musket, abolished the rest (a four foot long pole on which the musket was steadied while firing), reduced the number of loading motions, and introduced cartridges. The impact of these actions was to increase the rate of fire. Further, he introduced firing from a kneeling position so that three ranks could fire at the same time.<sup>12</sup>

He realized that the power of cavalry lay in shock action - not fire. He formed his cavalry in three ranks, instead of six, had only the front rank fire a pistol, and then had the whole line charge with drawn swords at the gallop. He mounted a number of musketeers, but had them fight only on foot - these were the dragoons.<sup>13</sup>

Gustavus Adolphus was the founder of field artillery. He introduced the light gun, which could accompany troops anywhere and fire twice as fast as a musketeer. He attached light guns to regiments; he ordered the development of the leather cannon, a forerunner of the machine gun. The leather cannon was very light; it could be moved by two men. It also heated up quickly - after eight to twelve rounds, firing had to be suspended to allow it to cool. Gustavus Adolphus raised the artillery to the dignity of the third arm.<sup>14</sup>

The developments with regard to the infantry, cavalry, and artillery related in the preceding four paragraphs may seem prosaic, but, in fact, they were brilliant innovations, vast departures from past practice, carefully studied, and just as studiously copied and imitated. Even more relevant to us is the combination of the efforts of all three arms to gain the purpose of the battle. Combining the more rapid fire of the infantry, the shock action of the cavalry, and the quick-firing, mobile artillery in mutual support of each other marked the beginning of modern tactics.<sup>15</sup>

Gustavus Adolphus was the founder of linear tactics. He discarded the massive formations of 30, 40, and 50 ranks deep, organized on a narrow front, with no reserves. Instead, he drew his army up in two lines and a reserve: the idea was to obtain an increase in the volume of fire by more extended and thinner formations. The Swedish line stood six deep, but often deployed to three deep. The distance between the two lines was approximately 300 yards. Besides the general reserve which was to the

center and rear of the second line, there were also local reserves of cavalry and musketeers behind the first line.<sup>16</sup> The impact: greater battlefield mobility and flexibility, the ability to reinforce, and the ability to exploit success. We seek the same things today.

Before Gustavus Adolphus, armies did not conduct flank attacks and there was no reconnaissance before nor pursuit after battle. With regard to pursuit, I remember a quote, attributed to Turenne, about pursuits. Following a battle the victor did the following: first, announce the victory; second, bury the dead; third, give thanks to God; and, fourth, conduct the pursuit. Without a reserve or other pool of uncommitted forces pursuit was highly unlikely. Gustavus' order of battle made this possibility highly probable. Getting ahead of the story, failure to pursue and exploit a victory is about the only tactical criticism of any substance that can be leveled at Turenne.

Gustavus' most famous and instructive engagements illustrate what has already been discussed. The Battles of Breitenfeld, September 1631, Lutzen, November 1632, and the crossing of the Lech River, April 1632, were most significant. Breitenfeld has been termed one of the most decisive victories in history, due more to superior Swedish tactics, than personal or individual superiority.<sup>17</sup> The crossing of the Lech River, utilizing ruse and deception, was a chapter out of Hannibal's manual, and the method used resembles that of Hannibal at the Hydaspes. Lutzen was an incredibly bloody battle, taking the life of Gustavus Adolphus, among the many thousands slain. It is probably accurate to call it a Swedish victory, but a pyrrhic one indeed.



Gustavus Adolphus was ahead of his time. He appreciated that mobility is better than entrenchments, field armies are more important than fortresses, and that the true objective in war is not the capture of fortresses or relief of beleaguered garrisons, but destruction of the enemy's armed forces.<sup>18</sup> He was a careful strategist, ensuring a secure base of operations and the security of his country before committing forces. He ensured that his war aims supported and were subordinate to his political aims. By his leadership he enjoyed the most cordial and agreeable relations with his countrymen. He made Sweden a great power. It is interesting to contemplate the further impacts he would have made on the art of war and warfare had he survived. Certainly Sweden would have dictated the terms of the peace and would have ruled all of Germany, and the Thirty Years War would have taken something less than 30 years. Given the tenor of the times, no doubt some other power would have been threatened by Sweden's increased power and would have fomented insurrection; another conflict would have erupted.

There is much in the inquisitive nature of the man's mind, in the strength of his character, in his concern for people, in his courage and boldness, and in his thoroughness and perseverance to recommend him. In many of his innovations lie the principles which, afterwards, became the basis for the tactics of Frederick and the strategy of Napoleon. Although technology has transformed his tactical innovations, the underlying principles of combined arms action, receiving their initial modern expression under Gustavus and emphasizing the synergistic effect of the pooling of all combat power at the decisive point and time, is the basis of our doctrine today.

## ENDNOTES

1. My principal source for Gustavus Adolphus is Lieut. Colonel Edward M.E. Noel, Gustaf Adolf: The Father of Modern War (London: John Bale, Sons and Danielson, Ltd., 1905). This is a small volume (113 pages) but, I think, a generally accurate and tightly-focused analysis of Gustaf Adolph's contributions to the art of war. Where I felt the need for amplification or context, I used the far more expansive narrative by T.A. Dodge, Gustavus Adolphus (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Company, 1895). Noel's work is akin to Frederick's "culling of the diamonds from the dung hill" in its succinctness and to-the-point explanations. Each man has a military background. Their respective works do not agree completely in their interpretations and implications of events.

2. Dodge, Gustavus Adolphus, Vol. I, p. vii, p. 1.
3. Ibid., p. 10.
4. Noel, Gustaf Adolf, pp. 11, 12, 99.
5. Dodge, Gustavus Adolphus, Vol. I, pp. 67-69.
6. Noel, Gustaf Adolf, p. 16.
7. Dodge, Gustavus Adolphus, Vol. I, pp. 86-88.
8. Noel, Gustaf Adolf, p. 7.
9. Ibid., p. 37.
10. Ibid., pp. 11, 17.
11. Ibid., pp. 18, 26.
12. Ibid., p. 26.
13. Ibid., p. 27.
14. Ibid., p. 28.
15. Ibid., pp. 32-33.
16. Ibid., pp. 18, 21, 29-32.
17. Ibid., p. 60.
18. Ibid., p. 80.

## CHAPTER VI

### TURENNE<sup>1</sup>

The lives of Gustavus Adolphus and Turenne overlapped. Henri de la Tour d'Auvergnese, Vicomte de Turenne, was born in 1611 of Dutch and Auvergnese ancestry and was raised a Protestant at a time when your religious preference was far more important and relevant than it is today. During the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries war was a constant fixture on the European continent; alliances were entered into and repudiated with great rapidity; and, during the life of Turenne, it was, as Weygand observes, a time when one's duty was more difficult to discover than to perform.<sup>2</sup> Turenne entered the service of the King of France (a Catholic monarch) at the age of 19 in 1630, and although his loyalty and steadfastness in the cause of the Crown was questioned on numerous occasions in light of his religious convictions, he served it with unsurpassed distinction and brilliance for 45 years. He was killed by a shot from a small gun at the beginning of the campaign of 1675, on the Rhine, at the age of 64.<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps the place to begin our examination and assessment of Marshal Turenne's contributions to the art of war is at the end of his life. Turenne conducted a number of great campaigns throughout the course of his service, but it is generally acknowledged that his most brilliant campaign was his last: that of 1674. This is most remarkable in view of his advanced age and the popular and prevalent belief (not unjustifiably held and

perhaps more widely held today than in the seventeenth century) that warfare was a young man's business. In this century (the twentieth) treatises have appeared analyzing "the disease of the generals": the symptoms of which are, with increasing age, the decay in vigor, the failure of courage, the increasing tendency to take counsel of your fears, and the loss of vision (and I do not mean mere sight, but the broad and interconnected view of the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of war), among others.<sup>4</sup> During this year (1674), Turenne inflicted great defeats on the Imperial forces of Germany, while greatly outnumbered and inferior by just about any other measure, except leadership, to his adversaries. The victories at Sinzheim, Ensheim, and Turkheim were crucial to the security of France. In a way they remind one of the actions of Mannstein in the conduct of the mobile defense by Army Group South against the Russians in the Donbas operations of February 1943. The manifest conviction is that of the supremacy of maneuver warfare, boldly and audaciously, but prudently, undertaken as a form of defense.

Several aspects mark these actions: Turenne's genius for quick decision and rapid movement of his army; the bold and audacious nature of his actions, tempered with a careful calculation of and provision for risk; his incomparable fearlessness, proof of remarkable physical endurance, and extensive activity - he was always where he was needed, when he was needed, to deliver a correct decision; his knowledge of the weaknesses of a coalition; how to defend by being constantly on the offensive; and his tactics, while leaving nothing to chance and ever flexible,

considered everything - the enemy, the terrain, the estimation of all possibilities. In short, Turenne got better with age: his outlook broadened, his decisions reflected infallible judgment, his character became more resolute and lofty, his planning and execution became more enterprising and daring, and the love and veneration of his troops for him became greater to the very end of his life.<sup>5</sup> France, on more than one occasion, owed her continued existence to the enterprise of this great soldier.

Turenne, like Hannibal, was a servant of the State, as are we today. Despite aspersions on his loyalty mentioned above, he served his King faithfully, with one exception. Today this "exception" would be considered treason, but in the context of the political realities of the time it was overlooked as Turenne redeemed himself by initiative, fearlessness and political sagacity, while retrieving a desperate situation for the Crown. In the process he restored the King and his Court to Paris and ended a revolt by the nobles.<sup>6</sup> The issue revolved around the honor of Turenne's family (obedience to whom, according to the political principles of the day, was his highest duty), the House of Bouillon, and the failure of the First Minister of the King, Mazarin, to restore, as previously agreed, lands to the family.<sup>7</sup> Turenne, with whom family honor came before personal ambition (which was solely military),<sup>8</sup> reluctantly and perhaps swayed by an infatuation with an attractive Duchess, took the side of the Fronde party (supported by Spain) against the Court party (which included the King). Turenne did not maintain this posture for

long. Weygand says that treason suited neither Turenne's disposition nor his heart and that clear-sighted honesty showed him where his duty lay.<sup>9</sup> Patriotism was not a definite concept in the mid-1600's, and Turenne's return of service was welcomed by the King.<sup>10</sup>

The foregoing gives you some idea of Turenne's character. The following augments the description. Early in his life he showed no brilliant qualities. He was rather delicate and sickly but devoted himself to physical exercises. He had a sluggish mind, but was a regular and conscientious worker. He had difficulty speaking and became confused when interrupted. He read of the exploits of Alexander and became enthused over tales of war. He demonstrated a decided taste for the profession of arms and took readily to the tough military training of his uncles, Maurice and Henry of Nassau. He was very determined and persevering and learned soldiering from the lowest ranks, sharing all the tasks of the common soldier which, no doubt, formed the basis for his concern for his soldiers.<sup>11</sup> Very early in his career he distinguished himself by his gallantry, seeking the most hazardous of missions; he was punctual, precise, and attentive to details as a company commander.<sup>12</sup>

At Court he was out of his element throughout his life. He had nothing in the way of personal charm; he did not have an alert mentality, was not fashionable in appearance, and had no air of distinction. He was entirely devoid of haughtiness and a foe to all useless ostentation - he was simple in manner and very modest. Turenne was very reserved and difficult of approach by

any except his own people. He was intimidated at Court; he had no self-confidence among courtiers.<sup>13</sup>

Louis XIII was King of France when Turenne entered the service of the King in 1630. Cardinal Richelieu was his First Minister. Richelieu died in 1642; Louis the XIII in 1643. Louis the XIV was, in 1643, only 5 years old; therefore, Cardinal Mazarin was appointed First Minister by the Regent, Queen Anne of Austria, Louis XIV's mother.<sup>14</sup> Mazarin, effectively, ran France until his death in 1661 when Louis XIV, then 23 years old, undertook the personal government of France, rather than continue to govern through a Council of State. Louis XIV governed for the next 48 years.<sup>15</sup> I recite this sequence of key French leaders so that we can see from whom Turenne took orders. He chaffed under the civil leadership of that day much as we do today.

By any standard, Turenne advanced rapidly in the French Army. In 1643, after 13 years in the King's service, he was made a Marshal of France. He was 32 years old. Clearly, Turenne's abilities had attracted the attention of Richelieu and the King. The appointment of Mazarin marked the beginning of a long (18 years) and fruitful collaboration for France. The relationship between Turenne and Mazarin grew especially close and was a particularly open one. Following Mazarin's death in 1661, Louis XIV personally ran the government. Throughout this period of time, from 1643 until his death in 1675, Turenne's stature as an advisor, confidant, soldier, diplomat, and head of a family with extensive royal ties by marriage throughout Europe, increased. He grew tremendously, taking part in decisions of high military

policy, demonstrating sure judgment; he learned how to wage coalition warfare and how to use time and space; his character grew stronger - he announced and supported his opinions;<sup>16</sup> he displayed tact, political acumen, moderation, and detachment.<sup>17</sup> He insisted on exact information; exhibited discretion, prudence, exactitude; he was opportunistic and kept the aim of advancing France's interests foremost; he gave good advice to a young King, greedy for conquest.<sup>18</sup>

I think a strong parallel with the course of Turenne's advancement exists in our army today. My perception is that soldiers today rise to the highest levels only if they have extensive duty at the seat of government and have extensive contacts in the government. This is a state of affairs which is natural enough: being competent militarily is not enough, you must be able to integrate military capabilities with other national capabilities, in furtherance of national interests. Turenne was able to do that, and he never attended the Army War College!

To my mind, Turenne was a consummate practitioner of the art of war rather than an innovator a la Gustavus Adolphus. Turenne's commitment to maneuver warfare was decidedly unusual for his day. From my understanding, Gustavus Adolphus showed the way in this regard, although it may be said that neither he nor Turenne had great influence, most generals preferring seige warfare to open battle.<sup>19</sup> The most prevalent warfighting strategy of the mid-seventeenth century held that: "one should exhaust



all other means before coming to battle; skillful generals are less anxious to fight battles where both sides run equal risks, than to destroy the enemy by other means."<sup>20</sup> Battle was to be avoided, this led to long, protracted sieges during which armies lived off of and devastated the surrounding country. Turenne's advice, in his own words, was: "undertake few sieges and fight plenty of battles. When you are surely master of the country, villages are worth as much as forts. But men consider their honor at stake in the difficult capture of a strongly fortified town much more than in devising a method of easy conquest of a whole province."<sup>21</sup> In this sense, he was innovative. Although Turenne was preeminent in his day at maneuver warfare, he could conduct a successful siege and, in fact, did so as the situation demanded.

Turenne placed great importance on artillery fire. During the battle of Ensheim, 2,500 artillery rounds were fired, a tremendous number in those days. He skillfully combined movement with the use of entrenchments. His plans always anticipated the unexpected - flexibility was an ever-present feature.<sup>22</sup> Turenne, while not coining the term, was really the inventor of the oblique order,<sup>23</sup> which Frederick, 100 years later, would perfect. Gustavus Adolphus, through coincidence of terrain and adversary ineptness, sort of attacked on the flanks of his foes; Turenne executed the same maneuver by design; and Frederick so drilled his troops to perfection that they could maneuver on the field of

battle onto an opponent's flank before he (the foe) could adjust his lines. Each was trying to gain an advantage and avoid a frontal assault. Isn't this what we are all about today? Don't we try to attack where it is least expected and where we can gain a decisive and favorable combat ratio using all combat arms?

I mentioned, while discussing Gustavus Adolphus, that pursuits were rarely, if ever, conducted. The supposition was that the enemy might turn and fight yet again. Since pursuits were not conducted, battles were rarely decisive. Since battles were rarely decisive and very expensive in terms of men and materiel consumed, the tendency to avoid battle was extensive. In this regard, Turenne is justly criticized. Weygand notes that 17th century wars were different from 18th and 19th century wars in their objects.<sup>24</sup>

In defeat, and Turenne was defeated at Marienthal with the loss of a large part of his infantry, 12 guns, and 1,200 cavalry, he showed great character and frankness. He did not try to minimize the importance of the defeat and offered to resign. Mazarin refused his offer.

Turenne was, arguably, the greatest French soldier prior to Napoleon. His was a distinguished career that was uniformly brilliant throughout his lifetime, becoming more so as he aged. He employed his army as a combined arms team, although relying more on cavalry rather than infantry as Gustavus Adolphus had indicated produced better results. Turenne did utilize artillery to a significant extent, but, again, not of the type nor to the

extent indicated by Gustavus Adolphus. While he fought many battles crucial to the security of France, none were as decisive as the Battles of Breitenfeld or Lutzen. He did conduct maneuver warfare with great skill. He was a soldier-statesman of great importance to this country.

#### ENDNOTES

1. My principal source on Turenne is General Maximus Weygand, Turenne: Marshal of France, trans. by George B. Ives (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1930). This book is short on details of campaigns and battles but generally long on analysis of, implications of, and rationale for Marshal Turenne's actions. I can also recommend reading about the notorious leadership of the author, Gen. Max Weygand.

2. Ibid., p. 38.

3. Ibid., p. 239.

4. J.F.C. Fuller, Generalship: Its Diseases and Their Cure, A Study of the Personal Factor in Command (Harrisburg, Pa., Military Service Publishing Company, 1936).

5. Weygand, Turenne: Marshal of France, pp. 217, 225, 229-230, 253-154.

6. Ibid., p. 67.

7. Ibid., pp. 27-31.

8. Ibid., p. 36.

9. Ibid., p. 60.

10. Ibid., p. 51.

11. Ibid., pp. 10-11.

12. Ibid., pp. 11-12.

13. Ibid., pp. 13, 14, 26, 134.

14. Ibid., pp. 30, 33.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to know why a decision was made until you know the possible alternatives at the time of the decision. Why Napoleon selected these men from among the field of contenders probably has something to do with their predilection for maneuver warfare; for their eminence among their contemporaries; in the case of Turenne (notwithstanding his other obvious qualifications) he may have needed a Frenchman for his list; for their similarity in philosophy to his own; for the availability of information, both in quantity and quality, for study - no doubt, the reasons could go on, but they are not the point.

I have looked for similarities and themes that unite each of these five men. The penchant for activity and the desire for battle, to engage the enemy's forces, rather than his fortresses and strong points, has been mentioned. Reflected in their campaigns one sees the emergence of a set of rules, maxims, principles, if you will. What seems to be equally clear is that slavish adherence to a set of rules or principles has not been manifested. Often we have seen them violated or ignored, however, never from ignorance, but only after profound calculation. MacDougall noted that "nothing is more certain than that a commander, who is overanxious to square his proceedings by written rules, will never do anything great."<sup>1</sup> These men were ground-breakers, who diverged from the routine practices of the day, and who advanced the art of war. Today, we teach a list of principles of war, as guidelines, not as prescriptions, for

tactical, operational, or strategic success. Our list today originated with the campaigns of the men we have discussed. It remains for you and me to apply them, or ignore them, in our circumstances today as adroitly as did these men in their day.

I think that these men considered logistics to be important, but, of the five, Alexander and Gustavus Adolphus were most noteworthy - Caesar gave logistics little attention; Turenne followed the practice of the day and allowed his army to devastate the countryside, and Hannibal burdened himself with an enormous gaggle of baggage. Alexander established a system of supply that was noteworthy for its ability to keep up with him across Asia; Gustavus Adolphus established magazines so that his armies were relatively free of large and cumbersome trains. Too, the need to destroy the country in which the war was being fought to support the army was obviated.

What about the notion that was is a young man's business and that, as one ages, one loses "the sacred fire in the bottom of his heart"? With the exception of Turenne, whose most brilliant campaign was conducted at the age of 64, relative youth seems to prevail. Alexander was between the ages of 21 and 33 when he conquered the Persian Empire; Hannibal between the ages of 27 and 43 during his occupation of Italy; Caesar between the ages of 35 and 56 when he was most ascendant; and Gustavus Adolphus between the ages of 17 and 38 when he led Sweden to power. I am not sure this establishes anything - a great deal depends on the individual. Our personnel policies today keep our army from getting

old - the up-or-out promotion system and mandatory retirement ages ensures that few will serve beyond the age of 50. Perhaps this explicitly recognizes the desirability of a youthful army.

I think it is interesting to note the relatively condensed time span from which these men, and therefore, the basis for the art of war, emerged. From the commencement of Alexander's reign in 336 B.C., to the end of Caesar's reign in 44 B.C. is approximately 300 years. From Gustavus Adolphus' reign in 1611 to Turenne's death is, in round numbers, 65 years; to the conclusion of Napoleon's reign (1611-1815) is 200 years; to today (1611-1980), assuming the 20th century has contributed something to the art of war other than an updating of strategy and tactics predicated on technological advances (and I do not say that this is a valid assumption), is four centuries. Thus, in approximately 700 years has the art of war evolved. This seems to me to be a relatively short time span. Another way of looking at it, I guess, is that innovations in the art of war have come thick and fast when great men have put their minds to it.

There seems to me to be several traits and personal characteristics that all of these men exhibited that are relevant to us today. Foremost among these is courage, both physical and moral. Physical courage is not passe. It remains very much a requirement for today's leader. Moral courage is even more in demand today as values and traditions are challenged. Each man was supremely self-confident and infused this spark in his men. Each man well understood the moral factors of warfare. This may have

lost some relevance today when patriotism and love of country are fostered and well-defined. Lamentably, few of our leaders today are inspirational, which is too bad because soldiers today still need to be inspired. Each of the men we have discussed knew this and set a valorous example, established a reputation for winning, and shared the hardships of their men. This factor is most intangible but most critical whether you are a platoon leader or the commanding general. Good judgment, emanating from a thorough understanding of your craft, and perseverance, emanating from a firm grasp of your ultimate objective seems to be common and still relevant.

Scott, no doubt you have grasped by now there is no exclusive list of Great Captains. Each man has something to offer - one is fortunate to have so many excellent examples from which to pick and choose as guides. The selection and integration of styles and actions is the interesting and fun part.

Love,

Dad

#### ENDNOTES

1. Lieut. Col. P.L. MacDougall, The Campaigns of Hannibal Arranged and Critically Considered Expressly for the Use of Students of Military History (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, and Roberts, 1858), p. 81.

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2. Clausewitz, Carl Von. On War. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976. Ed. and trans. by Michael Howard and Peter Paret.
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